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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NAIROBI 002619

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/24/2026

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SUBJECT: MALINDI: MIXING SUN, DRUGS, CORRUPTION AND A  
MARGINALIZED ISLAMIC MAJORITY ON KENYA'S COAST

Classified By: A/PolCouns L. Peterson, Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Kenyan coastal resort town of Malindi is schizophrenic: hundreds of Italians - and upcountry Kenyans - dominate the town,s economic lifeline, a tourism industry that caters to tens of thousands of European sun-seekers annually. Some are involved in feeding the town,s skyrocketing illegal drug consumption; a resident Italian (and his Venezuelan wife) were arrested in connection to last December,s one-ton record haul of cocaine (from Venezuela). Political and/or police protection is likely. The town,s Muslim majority, meanwhile, shun (or are denied) jobs in the beer-drinking, pork-eating and immodest tourist trade. Muslim-Christian tensions are on the rise, although Muslim leaders say they strongly support the overall financial benefits of tourism for their community. Muslim elders eagerly sought "a real partnership" with the U.S., even as they criticized the "U.S. war on Islam" and confessed doubts about U.S. genuineness and intentions. END SUMMARY.

Mmm, Malindi  
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2. (U) Settled over the centuries by Arab traders, the Portuguese and the British, Malindi was only "discovered" by modern-day Italians in the 1980s. Today, one is more likely to hear Italian than Kiswahili spoken at the finer local restaurants in this sun-kissed town of 65,000. At least 700 Italians are year-round residents. Hundreds more have bought large tracts of choice real estate, established businesses and become part-time residents and absentee landlords. Italians own some 4-5000 villas around the town, which cater to the 15-20,000 Italian tourists who descend on Malindi during Italy,s winter months. Local Muslim leaders and the Italian consul (a 27-year resident) concur that Italians have become -- and are resented as -- the town,s business elite.

Trouble in paradise? Crime -- piccolo e grande -- in Malindi  
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3. (U) Muslim leaders, police and the Italian consul (a 27-year resident) all agreed that local drug consumption has skyrocketed since 2000. Muslim youths shun working in the hotel industry - the main business in the one industry town - due to alcohol and pork consumption. Others are denied "downstream" employment providing services and supplies, as Italians prefer to do business with fellow expatriates. Unemployed local youths have turned to drugs - cocaine, hashish, "brown sugar" (heroin), and marijuana. They both use and sell to the tens of thousands of European tourists who flock during Europe,s winter months. Some long-term resident Italians are evidently involved in the trafficking.

4. (C) Crime rings often involve current or former police, frequently working with some level of political protection. The Italian consul (strictly protect throughout) termed the local MP, mayor and politicians "corrupt," and the police "worse than useless." Kenyan police are involved in extorting tourists. Local girls sell drugs to unsuspecting tourists - then the CID/police swoop in and demand payoffs not to prosecute the tourists. Cops (who can double as prosecutors in Kenya,s legal system) are also shaking down Italian businessmen. One, introduced to PolCouns, paid 4000 USD to avoid a 7-year prison sentence for an illegal starter pistol. At the same time, Italian consul noted that Kenyan authorities have a clear history of denying major extradition requests. One Italian living openly in Malindi is facing a thirty year Italian prison sentence - if only Kenya would extradite him. Other Europeans sought on drug charges have similarly avoided extradition by political payoffs and protection. Malindi service is said to be so profitable that cops (Kikuyu) reportedly pay bribes to be assigned there. But this state of affairs worked for him, the consul volunteered, because he knew whom to contact to "get things done." But for the locals, he said, it was a terrible state of affairs.

5. (C) Large-scale narcotics, trafficking is also occurring in, or at least through, Malindi. Italian Angelo Ricci, age 73, and his wife were arrested last December after 700-plus kilos of cocaine were uncovered in a speedboat at a house they rented out to tenants who were later charged in the affair. This seizure, plus a related 300 kilos seized while being repacked in a Nairobi shipping container depot make up the largest single cocaine seizure in African

history. (The cocaine had evidently come from Venezuela for repackaging in Kenya for onward shipment to Europe.) Ricci, who has split his time between Malindi and Europe since the early 1990s, is locally known for his high-stakes gambling addiction. But "his Mafia history in Milan," said one who knew him, had always been just "small-time crime " never narcotics." The ton of cocaine, perhaps not so coincidentally, came from the country of his wife,s origin - Venezuela.

16. (C) Local police leadership is clueless at best. Deputy Police Commander for Malindi Division claimed to know nothing of that day,s page one headline "120 hardcore criminals targeted on Coast Police operations." Nor could he identify which drug was most commonly abused or sold; nor was he aware that one of the Kikambala suspects just freed was likely to return to his family in Malindi.

17. (C) All sides agreed that what used to be Kenyan-Italian tensions in Malindi are becoming Muslim-Christian tensions. Several wealthy Muslim families, with significant Saudi financial support, have doubled the number of mosques in the past five years. And tensions are rising. A gunbattle occurred in May between Muslims and Christians in a small town north of Malindi. Christian and Muslim youths gather and yell at each other from opposite sides of the streets after Friday prayers in Malindi. The Consul said several Muslim "rabble-rousers" were working to increase tensions. They were not working from the mosques, he claimed, but from the streets among the unemployed youth.

"Is the hand shakeable?"  
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18. (SBU) Poloffs and CJTF-HOA Civil Affairs team leader met with eight Muslim leaders from Malindi,s religious, business, educational and NGO communities. The planned one-hour meeting stretched into two -- and then three -- as the group engaged in an increasingly frank dialogue. Initial discussions on local education, youth unemployment and skyrocketing drug use turned to a freewheeling discussion of the U.S. and Islam. Leaders were well aware of U.S. civil affairs efforts further north (Lamu) and South (Kilifi, Mombasa) along Kenya,s coast, and sought greater attention to Malindi,s own needs. Interested in increased contacts with the USG, they requested U.S. college scholarships for local students; some expressed concern about the cutoff of U.S. military assistance to Kenya due to Article 98. But they also readily admitted suspicions of U.S. motives for engagement. Intrigued, they asked, "Why now? What is your interest? Is the hand (extended by the U.S.) shakeable?" They repeatedly said they sought "a real partnership" with the U.S.

19. (SBU) Muslim leaders nonetheless expressed a belief that the current U.S. administration was waging war "against Islam." Many of their opinions also betrayed an underlying belief that the USG was omnipotent - and behind all that happens in the world, from the Algerian civil war to key decisions in Kenyan politics. Behind the U.S., some clearly saw "the Jews." The U.S., they asserted, could easily solve the Israeli-Palestine conflict -- if only we really tried. At the same time, Saudi and Egyptian leaders were pseudo-Islamists, using their positions to oppress the people while obtaining American largesse and political support. They complained that U.S. efforts to restrict terror financing had dramatically reduced Islamic NGO contributions to their communities. Among the few books emboffs were shown in the private elementary school,s library were Arabic-language texts donated by Kuwait: they appealed for U.S. book contributions.

110. (SBU) Misinformation was evident, even as they appeared reasonably open to learning new facts. One asked about the Internet rumor that 4000 Jews stayed home from work at the World Trade Center on 9/11. The Taliban rose up, another claimed, because the U.S. sought to impose U.S.-style democracy after the Soviet pull-out (and not because the U.S. walked away thereafter). The USG is now "going after" Sudan. Yet another rumor: that the U.S. is seeking to rewrite the Koran.

111. (SBU) While they rejected U.S. political intervention as a matter of principal, they were not shy in asking the Embassy to pressure President Kibaki to accept a continuing role for khadis courts in the draft constitution. (We told them the issue was for Kenyans to determine; our concern was that some politicians were inciting (Christian) religious fervor to block passage of the draft constitution.) Seeing a potential opening, one Imam asked if the United States could accept a country ruled by sharia, "you know, where a thief loses his hand, and an adulterer is stoned to death." While he appreciated the direct answer, he was evidently not pleased when told we could not if that meant a regime that ruled like the National Islamic Front in Sudan or the Taliban in Afghanistan, denying fundamental rights to women and

harboring international terrorists.

112. (SBU) After much criticism of U.S. policy and requests for clarifications of U.S. actions, emboffs asked why there was no criticism of Islamic suicide attacks on other Muslims, in Iraq or elsewhere. "Because they are powerless," came the response. They cannot attack the U.S. directly, so they attack U.S. "puppets," like Iraqis lined up to become police recruits. "We oppose it," they claimed, "but do not expect us to directly speak out against it." After complaints that Kenya's Muslims remained marginalized from national politics and a request for U.S. political support, emboffs asked how that support should be expressed so as to not undermine the reforms the Muslims sought. Quiet, private diplomacy, said some; high-profile public statements said others. Asked how the U.S. could assist reform efforts in the Islamic world while avoiding situations in which anti-democratic forces -- Islamist or otherwise -- sought "one man, one vote, one time," they had no answer.

113. (C) COMMENT: Malindi leaders, particularly from the Muslim community, have complained in the past that the U.S. has not been engaged in their community. Although there is substantial suspicion of U.S. motivations and policies, the Muslim leaders we met were clearly open to the possibility of engagement with the U.S. Whether through CA projects, public diplomacy outreach, or political engagement, Post will continue to foster a relationship with the communities in Malindi. END COMMENT.

BELLAMY